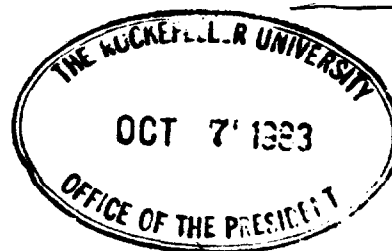




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RKM

27 September 1983

President Joshua Lederberg
The Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
New York, New York 10021

Dear President Lederberg:

Your letter to me containing a question about a sentiment in the History of Science arrived at a time when my wife was extremely ill, in hospital, shortly before she died. You may well imagine that ever since my life has been in a state of terrible confusion, with a result that many requests to me have gone unheeded. I begin my letter with a statement of these melancholy facts of my life simply so that you will not think of me rude in not having replied immediately to your request.

As far as I know, the first person to state clearly and explicitly that those who disparage new ideas do it in two stages--first by showing that the new idea is wrong, and second by showing that in any event it is not original--the first person, I say, to my knowledge to have expressed this sentiment is Benjamin Franklin. I enclose xerox of the pages from a letter he wrote, included in his famous book on electricity of the 18th Century, in which he makes this statement. I include the title page, chiefly for identification purposes, and not merely because I happen to have been the editor (although it is interesting for me to observe that this was the first book I ever published).

I had hoped to be able to locate for you the expression of a similar sentiment on the part of Charles Darwin. If the subject should still be of interest to you, I could (with a very little research) find that Darwin letter which says much the same as what Benjamin Franklin had said a century earlier. The occasion, of course, was Darwin's reading a disparaging review of the Origin of Species which not only took him to task for his wrong ideas, but pointed out that, by and large, the ideas were not even original. You know, of course, that Darwin corrected this by later adding historical information to subsequent editions.

aphorisms - v. Humboldt

A recent example of this double-barreled mode of attack occurs in relation to a discussion of Tom Kuhn's seminal study of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions by Stephen Toulmin in his Human Understanding (published by Princeton Univ. Press, 1972). Pages 106 sqq are devoted to a deprecatory analysis of Kuhn's book, where--in addition to an attempt to demolish Kuhn's argument completely--he also explains that (p. 106) "The idea of analysing the network of explanations in a physical science has built around certain fundamental patterns of explanations, or para-deigmata, is in fact an old one." He gives then a list of examples of users of this expression, beginning with Lichtenberg in the 19th Century, Wittgenstein in the 20th Century, and then goes on to other pre-Kuhnian users of this term, namely, W. H. Watson, N. R. Hanson, and finally--not surprisingly--himself.

I greatly regret that the enormous pressures which have been developing will prevent me from attending the symposium next week, but I certainly hope we may have the chance of meeting and talking before too very long.

Sincerely,



I. ~~Bernard~~ Cohen
Victor S. Thomas Professor of
the History of Science

IBC/s
Encs.

cc: T. S. Kuhn